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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001425

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR D, SA, SA/INS, EUR/NB; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08-14-13

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [JA](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: No breakthroughs in meeting with Tigers, but Norwegian facilitators emerge with some confidence

Refs: (A) Oslo 1645 (Notal)

- (B) Colombo 1419, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Charge' d'Affaires. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In an August 13 meeting with the Charge', Norwegian Special Envoy Solheim and Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar said the atmospherics of their meeting with the Tigers earlier that day had been positive. They said they had discussed the Tigers' upcoming meeting in Paris. Re contentious matters, the Tigers reiterated that they had no plans to vacate a base in the east and denied involvement in a spate of killings of Tamil opponents. Queried by Charge' about a Japanese MFA document setting out possible next steps post-Tokyo, the GoN side said they continued to review it, but saw some problems. Although the meeting with the Tigers did not lead to any breakthroughs, the Norwegians seemed relatively optimistic about the state of the peace track. END SUMMARY.

Norwegians meet with the Tigers

12. (C) Late August 13, the Charge' (accompanied by polchief) met with Norwegian Special Envoy Erik Solheim, who is on an August 12-15 visit to Sri Lanka, and Ambassador to Sri Lanka Hans Brattskar. The focus of the discussion was the Norwegians' meeting earlier in the day with S.P. Thamilchelvam, the political chief of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Solheim said the atmospherics of the two hour meeting, which had taken place in the LTTE administrative center of Kilinochchi in the north, had been quite positive. Thamilchelvam, as is his customary style, had been professional and polite, listening keenly to the Norwegians. He seemed serious and businesslike, even when the GoN team raised contentious issues. Based on what he had heard, Solheim said he felt that the LTTE appeared committed to cooperating with the facilitation effort and moving forward with the peace process. Solheim confirmed he would travel to Batticaloa District in the east on August 14 to assess the situation there.

Upcoming meeting in Paris

13. (C) With respect to the substance of the discussions with Thamilchelvam, Solheim related that the first item on the agenda was the Tigers' upcoming meeting in Paris (see Reftels). The meeting was slated to begin on or about August 20 (there are reports the dates could slip by a week or so) and would continue for about 10 days. About 20 Tamils were scheduled to attend, with participants roughly split between those from the LTTE, led by Thamilchelvam himself, and those from outside Sri Lanka, including one from the U.S. (Note: We think this was a reference to V. Rudrakumar, a pro-LTTE lawyer based in the U.S.) The French government, Solheim said, was only providing visas for the meeting and nothing else. The Norwegian embassy in Paris was still scouting for a suitable venue for the meeting and it would probably take place in the city's suburbs. Solheim said he might participate in the latter stages of the meeting per a request he had received from the LTTE. Brattskar said he might also travel to Paris if his schedule allowed it.

14. (C) Solheim and Brattskar confirmed that the Paris meeting's focus would be on constitutional/legal issues. Specifically, the participants in the meeting were supposed to come up with ideas on how the LTTE should respond to the GSL's recent proposal setting out possible modalities of forming a Tiger-dominated interim administration in the north/east. Counter-proposals agreed to at the meeting would then be taken to the LTTE leadership in northern Sri Lanka for review. The LTTE would then get in touch with the Norwegians who, in turn, would pass the finally agreed on LTTE set of

counter-proposals to the government. Solheim expressed confidence that the LTTE would put forward a written document rather than just rejecting or finding fault with the government's proposal. Brattskar, who said the LTTE's counter-proposals would probably be "tough, but manageable," estimated that this whole process could take several weeks. While there were no guarantees and many things could happen, Brattskar continued, it was possible that GSL-LTTE talks could resume in the October timeframe.

Tigers hold the line on base in east

15. (C) Turning to an issue that has raised tensions in recent weeks, Solheim confirmed that he had urged the LTTE to dismantle its "Wan Ela" base near Trincomalee in the Eastern Province. Solheim said he had underlined that the situation was proving an embarrassment for the facilitation effort and the monitors. In response, Thamilchelvam said the Tigers were fully committed to adhering to the rulings of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). The Tigers, however, felt strongly that the SLMM's ruling regarding the base was wrong. The base, in fact, had not been constructed in government-held territory recently and thus did not violate the February 2002 ceasefire accord as the SLMM had ruled. The base, Thamilchelvam asserted, had actually been there for many years and LTTE "martyrs'" graves were located in the vicinity of the site. For these reasons, Thamilchelvam said, the LTTE's local commanders did not want to give up the base.

16. (C) Reflecting on Thamilchelvam's comments, Solheim remarked that he thought the Tigers' stance on the base issue was a hard one. That said, Thamilchelvam had indicated that he would take the Norwegians' request for the LTTE to dismantle the base back to LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran for further review. Solheim told the Charge' that there did not seem to be any "strategic" reason the Tigers had to hold onto the site. This might mean that maybe there was some way the LTTE could gradually climb down from its hard-line stance and find a "creative way" to vacate the base in the near-term. In any case, he commented, the Norwegians would continue to work on the issue with the LTTE, hoping that continuous interventions would have some constructive effect on Tiger thinking.

Issue of Killings

17. (C) The two Norwegians told the Charge' they also had beard Thamilchelvam on the dozens of killings of Tamils perpetrated by the LTTE over the past year. As the group has on multiple occasions, Brattskar said Thamilchelvam denied any Tiger culpability in the killings. He blamed other anti-LTTE Tamil groups for what had transpired and said the government needed to do a better job of investigating the crimes. Brattskar said the Norwegian side had underlined that the killings were doing serious damage to the Tigers' reputation in the international community and raising distrust of the peace track in the south. Solheim added that the LTTE had stopped other forms of terrorist activities in the past two years, such as suicide bombings, so there was hope that the group would eventually abandon the practice of assassinating its opponents. Norway would continue to raise the issue with the LTTE every time it could, he stressed.

Japanese MFA Document

18. (C) Shifting gears, the Charge' asked Solheim and Brattskar for the GoN's view of a document drafted by the Japanese MFA setting out possible next steps post-Tokyo donors conference. (Note: This document was class e-mailed to SA/INS and analyzed in Ref B.) Brattskar stated that Oslo had not yet finished its review of the document. Brattskar noted that he had expressed unhappiness with a clause mentioning "monitoring and review" of the progress of the peace process when he was provided the document by Japanese MFA official Takio Yamada last week. Such a review did not seem necessary, he said. Other aspects of the document also needed to be better defined. Brattskar went on to indicate that he thought the Japanese were being a bit clumsy, and there needed to be further clarification of the exact responsibilities of Norway and Japan on peace process issues. Nonetheless, Brattskar and Solheim emphasized that the GoN appreciated Japan's efforts and its desire to take on a more important role internationally. Norway also

understood that Japan was the largest donor to Sri Lanka and deserved a special role. Brattskar said he planned to speak to Japanese Ambassador Seiichiro Otsuka about the document once the latter returned from vacation.

COMMENT

19. (C) Although the meeting with the Tigers did not lead to any breakthroughs, the Norwegians seemed relatively optimistic about the state of the peace track. Their basic focus, which seems sensible to us, is to work all the angles possible to try to get the LTTE back to the direct talks. Without the talks, there is little doubt that tensions on-the-ground, such as over the base in the east, become that much harder to deal with. Solheim, who has a lot of experience with the LTTE, seemed to think that the group still wanted to play ball despite its stance on the base and the killings of Tamil opponents. That is good news, though the Norwegians -- correctly in our view -- underscored that the situation remained fragile. The Charge' expressed our support for the Norwegian facilitation effort, noting that we were committed to helping anyway we could. END COMMENT.

10. (U) Minimize considered.

ENTWISTLE